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ABSTRACT

Comparisons of British English and American English in the past have concentrated on similarities and differences at the phonetic, semantic, and syntactic level, while overlooking variation at the socio-cultural level. This paper examines how cultural differences are reflected in five speech acts: requesting, thanking, apologizing, complimenting, and greeting. After a report of a preliminary study of interviews with eight Americans and four Britons regarding cross-cultural speech act differences, the paper analyzes compliment data collected in both Great Britain and the United States. Results show that despite sharing an essentially common linguistic system, the rules for complimenting differ significantly cross culturally. Given the current trend of teaching language and culture simultaneously and given that American and British dialects serve as models of language instruction throughout the world, it is argued that consideration be given to such differences by English-as-a-Second-Language textbook writers, teachers, and students. (Author/LB)

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Speech act variation in British and American English

Angela Creese

Comparisons of British English and American English in the past have concentrated on similarities and differences at the phonetic, semantic and syntactic level, while overlooking variation at the socio-cultural level. This paper attempts first to investigate how cultural differences are reflected in five speech acts: requesting, thanking, apologizing, complimenting and greeting. It reports on the results of a preliminary study in which eight Americans and four Britons were interviewed in order to elicit their perceptions concerning speech act differences between the two cultures. Then the focus of the paper shifts to a more comprehensive analysis of one of the above speech acts, namely complimenting. Compliment data was collected in both Britain and the United States and analyzed with a view to revealing differences and similarities in language use. Results show that despite sharing an essentially common linguistic system, the rules for complimenting differ significantly cross culturally. Given the current trends of teaching language and culture simultaneously and given that American and British dialects serve as models of language instruction throughout the world, it is argued that consideration be given to such differences by ESL textbook writers, teachers and students alike.

THE ORIGIN OF THIS STUDY

As a British student living in America, I came to realize that despite sharing, for the most part, a similar linguistic code with my American friends, there were differences in the way we used our language. When I first arrived in the USA three years ago, I, like many foreign students, experienced what is generally known as culture shock. True, I did not have the additional problem that many foreign students face of speaking a new "language," but this certainly did not make things easier and in a way I felt it made things more difficult.

While going through this cultural adjustment, I was taking courses in sociolinguistics. The majority of readings for these classes concentrated on cultures speaking different languages. I became interested in whether a study of American and British English could provide an opportunity to separate cultural from linguistic miscommunication.

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Another reason for such a study is that as an ESL teacher I began to question what variation in American and British speech act use might mean to the teaching of English. Given that the current trend in ESL/EFL is towards the teaching of communicative strategies and given that standard British and American dialects are two of the international standards for instruction throughout the world, any differences in language use would be of immense importance to the EFL/ESL learner struggling to learn the communicative strategies of English speakers. Such thoughts prompted other questions: What does it mean to teach language and culture? Whose "cultural language rules" are we going to teach?

Language and Culture

> Language does not exist apart from culture, that is, from the socially inherited assemblage of practices and beliefs that determines the textures of our lives. (Sapir, 1921:207)

A culture uses its language to express its concepts, thoughts and wishes. Great anthropological linguists (Sapir, 1921, Whorf, 1939 etc.) in their studies of various native American languages have shown how studying the form of these languages can reveal cultural notions vastly different from those of speakers of Indo-European languages. For example, the Hopi organize time very differently from English speakers (Whorf, 1939: 158); Hanunoo color is not described only in brightness and shading, but also in terms of dryness and wetness (Conklin, 1964:191). Through the study of linguistic form, then, we are able to understand various things about a culture, how it organizes such notions as color, kinship, space, and time. Although Sapir and Whorf's work has shown that a study of form can indeed reveal many aspects about a culture, their work would not help us reveal any differences in language use between the two cultures under study here. That is, a study of tense and aspect in British and American English would likely reveal more similarities than differences between how the two cultures conceptualize time. Apart from the well-known differences in pronunciation, lexicon and syntax, American and British cultures share a linguistic code which is remarkably similar. For the most part, both societies use the same semantic terms to express color and kinship and use the same syntactic form to express grammatical categories, such as tense, number and aspect. Are we then to assume that, because British and American culture share so much linguistically, there are no cultural

differences? The answer is of course no. Instead, in order to help us with this cross-cultural comparison, we must turn to the work of Hymes and others.

Sociolinguistics

> it is not linguistics, but ethnography, not language, but communication, which must provide the frame of reference within which the place of language in culture and society is to be assessed (Hymes, 1974:4)

Hymes's work is so important because it focuses on the functions of language in context. Using a Hymsian framework, then, will allows us, not only to look at how form and function line up in the two English dialects, but allow us to study speech as it is foregrounded by the two culture groups.

Since the sixties, sociolinguistics has had a great impact, not only on anthropological studies of non-Western cultures, but also on our understanding of what is happening in our own British and American cultures. Sociolinguistics has grown so much in fact that today many approaches to the study of language and culture are grouped under its banner. The approach favored here was conceptualized by Austin (Austin, 1962) and Searle (Searle, 1962), and perfected as a means of analysis by Hymes (1974). This means of analysis was utilized as a research tool in ESL/EFL contexts by Wolfson (1989) and others–otherwise known as Speech Act Theory (analysis). Hymes defines the speech act as follows:

> It represents a level distinct from the sentence, and not identifiable with any single portion of other levels of grammar, nor with segments of any particular size defined in terms of other levels of grammar...To some extent speech acts may be analyzable by extensions of syntactic and semantic structure, as commonly analyzed in linguistics, but much of the knowledge that speakers share about the status of utterances as acts is immediate and abstract, and having to do with features of interaction and context as well as of grammar. (Hymes,1974:52)

Speech act analysis as proposed by Hymes has allowed us to identify an area of language use hitherto much neglected. Speech act studies on apologizing (Olshtain and Cohen, 1983), refusing (Beebe, Takahashi & Uliss-Weltz, 1985), expressing gratitude (Eisenstein and Bodman, 1986), complimenting (Herbert, 1986a, 1986b; Holmes, 1984, 1986, 1987; Wolfson 1981b, 1983; Wolfson and Manes, 1980), and invitations (Wolfson, 1979b), have provided many interesting and useful insights into cross-cultural variation of language use. Their findings continue to contribute

greatly to ESL classroom practices. More and more effort is being made to use these findings in teaching verbal strategies to ESL students. The emergence of books such as Say It Naturally (Wall, A. P., 1987) and Speaking Naturally (Tillit, B. & Bruder, M. N.,1985) are examples of such a trend. The idea behind such texts is that teaching formulaic speech acts will allow students to participate more fully in the culture in which they find themselves. Wolfson presents a convincing argument for teaching communicative strategies.

> Foreigners in English-speaking countries who have a reasonable command of English and who understand and can make themselves understood without great difficulty, are unconsciously assumed to be equally knowledgeable regarding the sociolinguistic rules of the community. Since linguistic competence is an aspect of communicative competence, people who have one are expected to have the other and are therefore held responsible for sociolinguistic violations in a way which those with less ability to communicate would not be. Furthermore, the fluent speaker in an English-speaking environment is likely to interact more with native speakers and therefore has more opportunities to err and in more ways (Wolfson, 1988b:149).

THE STUDY

There are two parts to this study. The first part raised general issues and attempted to pinpoint speech act similarities and differences between British and American speakers of English. The second part concentrated on one particular speech act, the compliment and its variation.

Part One

Defining the Speech Communities

> with the increased emphasis on nationalism in modern times, the question of the symbolic meaning of race and language has taken on a new significance and, whatever the scientist may say, the layman is ever inclined to see culture, language, and race as but different facets of a single social unity which he tends in turn to identify with such political entities as England or France or Germany....From this standpoint it really makes little difference whether history and anthropology support the popular identification of nationality, language and race. The important thing ... is that a particular language tends to become the fitting

> expression of a self-conscious nationality and that such a group will construct for itself, in spite of all that the physical anthropologist can do, a race to which is to be attributed the mystic power of creating a language and a culture as twin expressions of its psychic peculiarities (Sapir, in Mandelbaum, 1949:29).

I realize that it is very dangerous to equate nation with culture. Although throughout this paper I have been referring to British and American culture, I recognize that within the two nations there are many races, languages and cultures. Yet as Sapir mentions above, nationalism has had such a large impact on the way we think of culture in the twentieth century that, more often than not, the two become equated so that we often speak of American and British English meaning the English that characterizes those two nations rather than any specific "cultural group" within those nations. The two groups under study in the first part of this paper are middle class British and American academics working at the University of Pennsylvania.

Subjects

Twelve participants were selected and subsequently interviewed regarding their views on British and American speech act differences and similarities. Eight of these were white Americans who had either been to the UK or, through their work, had extensive contact with British people outside of the US. The other four participants were white British people who had been living in the USA for varying amounts of time, as the table below shows (the informants names have been changed so that they may remain anonymous):

Name	Nationality	Length of Stay
Simon	British	in US since 1983
Stuart	British	in US since 1978
Peter	British	in US since 1988
Steve	British	in US since 1982
Lynn	American	lived in England for 2 years
Susan	American	6 weeks in Northern Ireland summer 1989
Tom	American	summers of 1987,1988,1989 in Northern Ireland

Josh	American	6 weeks in N. Ireland summer 1989
Naiomi	American	3 weeks in England,1984
Doug	American	lived in England for one year, 1986-1987
David	American	contact with British academia outside England
Katherine	American	lived in England from 1983-1985

All interviews were conducted by myself, a British national. Although I am aware that this may have influenced responses, at this initial stage of research, finding an interviewer who was neither British nor American proved impossible.

Interviews

The interviews generally lasted around twenty minutes. Participants were told about the topic at the beginning of the interview and were told that they would be asked to comment on any differences they had noticed between American and British English other than in lexicon, pronunciation or syntax. During the interview, participants were given a list of speech acts and were asked to say whether they had observed any differences in the way they were expressed in the two cultures. This list can be found in the Appendix. Interviewees were encouraged to give anecdotal support to their observations, the idea being that these would symbolize the norms and values of speech and interaction in their own cultures and also indicate how they viewed the host culture. Definitions of the various terms were not given, it being taken for granted that although various speech acts might differ in the way they are used by the two groups, the actual lexical definitions were likely to be similar. The interview was used as a method to obtain intuitions and observations about how the interviewees think they behave and how they think the other group behaves. Thus, any observations made by the interviewees can be claimed to be neither correct nor incorrect; they simply need further empirical analysis which was conducted in the second part of this study.

Analysis

Lynn, American:

> "I think that the stereotype of British people of being more reserved is accurate and it's true that people are quieter at first and more reserved and that you need to have a more low key approach in some ways with people .....and I think that politeness is an accurate description of many British people that they are very good at softening criticisms and saying things, in a way that doesn't cause someone to become so defensive."

Stuart, British:

> "There is a level of superficiality in human contact here, that is very different from Britain. There is that first level of contact which is where you get the exchanges of "hellos", "how are you", and first name things and the second phase which almost stops you getting to know people as people. Well, in Britain I would say that barrier is broken down almost invisibly and that people do have much greater closeness and more willingness to get inside of people as people and I am really aware of that superficiality once and awhile, people that you really think you know and suddenly they are still quite distant from you. Words are being said but there is not that closeness."

These quotes capture, in part, the stereotypical views that the two cultures hold of each other, that is, the idea that English people are polite, indirect and cold as opposed to the Americans who are loud, direct and pseudo-friendly. Interestingly, the British comments above seem to mirror what many foreign ESL students say regarding American behavior. Experts are apt to blame the language deficiency of ESL students as the main reason they cannot make American friends. However, we cannot use this excuse in the case of Stuart since he is a native speaker of English.

Below I report on five of the speech acts in which there was consensus among my informants as to differences and similarities between language use in the two English speaking cultures.

Requests

Six of the nine Americans perceived the English as being more polite in requests and generally more indirect than Americans.

Lynn, American:

> "One time I was teaching in a school (in England) and a teacher was making a request of me. She had two types of students in her class and was interested in narrowing it down to one type and she wanted to give

away some students that she felt might more suitable in my class..but the way it was presented to me...I didn't see it as a request. I didn't get the sense that she felt pretty strongly about this, and that she really did want them to change level. But in effect her request was more serious, not more serious but it was, she was really hoping that I would take her students, but it was said in such a way that I didn't think it mattered."

Josh, American:

"As a general rule, the English were likely to say 'please' and 'thank you'...more apt to say 'please' and 'thank you' if they were asking for something."

Peter, British:

"I think they are more direct.....Just getting to the point very quickly. I remember going, we went away to Bath with Kim's family and with Kim's sister and she just picked up the telephone in the hotel and said, 'Have you got any VCR's, we'd like one please?' And they didn't actually have one they could lend to us but it was very direct and there was no 'would you mind' – any sort of ambling along initially to set up the situation, it was just straight in."

Steve, British:

"Americans will typically come straight out and ask you to do something will quite often just tell you to do something ;pass the bottle' and an American basically treats everyday requests as part of living and doesn't view asking for something trivial as infringing on your rights, etc."

Thanking

Both American and British interviewees said they had noticed differences in "thanking". One of these felt that British people were more profuse in thanking. One commented on the form, feeling that British people were more likely to use the complete "thank you" rather than its abbreviated "thanks". Four concentrated more on the types of things for which people thanked each other rather than on the frequency of thanking.

Katherine, American:

"I noticed that, at Oxford, people don't use the telephone as frequently as Americans do and I was frequently thanked for telephoning in circumstances that for me were absolutely routine...but it seemed to me even in other circumstances I would be thanked profusely for taking the time to telephone or spending the money to telephone."

One of the British interviewees felt Americans thanked more.

Stuart, British:

> "I would say that Americans are much more willing to use the word 'thank you' and say it much more quickly. Myself as an Englishman have the flaw of tending not to thank people still, because in England it is just something that you would expect people to do. More words are used here is what it comes down to, they say [it] a lot more."

The following comment came from a British male who commented on the longer thanking exchange that he had observed in the USA.

Simon, British:

> "Well I think the most obvious thing is that it seems obligatory in American English that you have to say something after somebody thanks you. like 'you're welcome,' 'not at all,' 'sure', something like that, which I never felt obliged to do in Britain, I mean you just say thanks and that's enough."

Apologizing

Two people commented on the difference between "sorry" and "excuse me". Two American participants felt that there was a difference in apologizing. One of them felt that British people apologized more to intimates for very small things. The other felt English people apologized more and that apologizing had a different use in England.

Katherine, American:

> "It struck me that people in England apologized a lot. Mostly in situations having to do with courtesy, if you approach a queue at the same time and it is not clear who has arrived first and there is that moment of adjusting into the other line."

Greetings

Three of the participants commented on greetings. One British participant who has been in America since 1983 still finds difficulty with American greeting formulas:

Simon, British

> "Well you know there is the classic 'How are you?' greeting which is not a question, which is just a greeting and I still find difficulty in that kind of encounter because I am still not sure what I should say, because I used to say 'How are you?' as if it were a British hello or good morning, but I think more is required."

The other two comments were about using first names versus using title and last name. They came from an American woman and a Briton who both felt, not surprisingly, that Americans used first names more than the British.

Complimenting

Seven of the interviewees felt that Americans complimented more than British people. Of these one felt that Americans used much stronger terms, i.e., adjectives.

Katherine, American:

> "Oh I think Americans compliment more readily and more and use much stronger terms, oh something is 'great,' the English will say something is 'super,' I think Americans will carry on in a lot more effusively, in a more enthusiastic kind of way. ...My recollection of listening to Americans in a shop is that they'll just carry on about a sweater in a way that once you are accustomed to the English way of speaking sounds completely overdone, too enthusiastic."

One British man (Peter) felt that American women compliment men more than English women do. Another felt that it was more dangerous to compliment women in America than it was in England. While working in America, he commented:

Simon,British:

> "I am very leery of complimenting. I used to compliment people a lot. It has become very political.... You know especially if you are in a position of power complimenting other people can be, you know what do you compliment people on? Do you compliment people on their looks, no absolutely not, that's a real no no these days. I can't say to anyone around here, you know that's a nice dress, or you look nice today, I mean you know it comes out later they sue you for sexism or something like that. I stopped complimenting people, for any reason basically...I find it very difficult for a man to do any complimenting at all."

This man seems to find the sociolinguistic rules so different that he has adopted an avoidance strategy for coping with the situation

Part Two

An empirical study was needed to test whether any of the participants' observations actually reflected everyday language use in the two cultures.

My reason for choosing the compliment as the speech act for further study was due mainly to the fact that a great deal of research had already been carried out in the United States (Wolfson, 1981a, 1981b,1983; Wolfson and Manes, 1980) and in other predominantly English- speaking countries, such as New Zealand (Holmes, 1987), and South Africa (Herbert, 1986a, 1986b, 1987). Consequently, a great deal more is known about the compliment than about other speech acts. In selecting the compliment as the speech act for further research, I hoped to contribute further to these findings by researching the form, function, and topic of the compliment in another English speaking speech community.

This part of the paper explores complimenting behavior among teachers in two schools, one in England and one in the United States. It briefly defines the compliment, discusses its functions and then makes cross-cultural comparisons of the two speech communities' complimenting behavior making reference to the considerable bulk of literature already available on the form, function and use of this speech act.

The Compliment and its Functions

> A compliment is a speech act which explicitly or implicitly attributes credit to someone other than the speaker, usually the person addressed, for some "good (possession, characteristic, skill, etc) which is positively valued by the speaker and the hearer. (Holmes, 1986)

Compliments have been referred to as solidarity builders that can consolidate the relationship between the speaker and the addressee (cf. Holmes 1984). They help dissipate social friction by serving to "create or maintain rapport" (Wolfson, 1983:86). What counts as a compliment, however, will differ from culture to culture and it is not difficult to imagine cultures or even situations where compliments may be seen as threatening the addressee's face (Brown and Levinson,1978), that is, where a compliment is seen as expressing envy or desire rather than building solidarity. The issue is an extremely complex one and it is, unfortunately, beyond the scope of this paper. It must suffice to say that complimenting is a complex cultural-linguistic skill. Not only will native speakers have the potential to manipulate the compliment to build solidarity between themselves and their listener but they will also be able to use the compliment to fulfill many other functions, such as encouragement, gratitude, etc.

The Speech Communities and Method of Data Collection

Data were collected from teachers' rooms in Britain and America. The British teachers' room was in a large comprehensive school in London. The American teachers' room was for teachers of an ESL university program in Philadelphia. For purposes of this paper, the teachers who share a teachers' room were considered a speech community.

The collection of data was naturalistic. Armed with index cards and pens, I noted down unsolicited compliments and their responses as they occurred in natural speech. Other information recorded was the speaker and hearer's sex, age, and status, and the relationship or social distance of the speaker and addressee (Wolfson 1986, 1988), these being of importance in an analysis of the structure and function of compliments.

The American data were collected by myself, a British national teaching in the same university's ESL program. The corpus consists of 73 compliments and compliment responses. The British data were collected by a British teacher teaching English in the London school. The British corpus consists of 138 compliments and compliment responses. Numbers are therefore small and any observations must be made with this in mind.

Analysis

There are many variables that can be compared in any cross-cultural study of complimenting behavior. I have chosen to look at four main areas previously researched in other cross-cultural compliment studies: lexical predictability, compliment response, syntactic categories and compliment topic. In the first two of these four areas, namely lexical predictability and compliment response, I found similarities between the two groups which agree with the existing literature. In the areas of syntactic categories and compliment topic, I found differences between the two speech communities which disagree with the literature.

Similarities

Compliments and lexical predictability

Both Holmes in her analysis of New Zealand data, (1986, 1987) and Wolfson in her analysis of American data (1978b, 1981a, 1981b, 1983, 1984)] have found that the majority of compliments are drawn from a very restricted range of items.

In the New Zealand data, 65% of the compliments used adjectives to express the positive affect. The total range of adjectives used in the data was approximately 86. However, the distribution was far from even; very few adjectives were used with high frequency. The six most frequently occurring adjectives were nice, good, lovely, beautiful, great, and neat, and these six adjectives accounted for about two-thirds of all the adjectives used. This pattern was even more marked in the American data. Wolfson (1984) notes that 80% of the compliments in the corpus "depended upon an adjective to carry the positive semantic load" (1984:236).

American data

The teachers in the American staff room used 39 adjectives in total (see table 1 above). The largest categories were nice (12 instances), beautiful (5 instances), good (4 instances) and great (2 instances). The other adjectives never occurred more than once.

Table 1 - Lexical Predictability

New Zealand (Holmes, 1984)	**America (Wolfson, 1984)**
2/3 of data	2/3 of data
nice	nice
good	good
lovely	beautiful
great	great
neat	

American Data (Creese, 1991)	**British Data (Creese, 1991)**
2/3 of data	2/3 of data
nice	good
beautiful	nice
good	great
great	lovely

British data

The teachers in the British staff room used 65 adjectives (see Table 1 above). The largest categories were: good (19 instances), nice (11 instances), great (5 instances), lovely (4 instances), beautiful, organized, committed wonderful, brill (3 each), and healthy (2 instances). The other adjectives never occurred more than once.

My findings are in keeping with the rest of the literature. There seems to be very little lexically that distinguishes the two groups.

Compliment Responses

Pomerantz (1978) in her study of American compliment responses reports that, for the addressee, the compliments presents a cultural conflict. That is, although the addressee has been taught to say "thank you," accepting the compliment will actually mean breaking ;another social norm, that of avoiding "self-praise." What Pomerantz calls "the self-praise avoidance" constraint will often lead the addressee of a compliment to downgrade it or to shift credit or even to disagree with the speaker. Since Pomerantz's work, an increasing amount of very interesting cross-cultural work has been done on compliment response. Janet Holmes' work in New Zealand found that "by far the most common New Zealand response to a compliment is to accept it (61%), with the next most frequent response being to deflect the credit (19%). It is relatively rarely that New Zealanders overtly reject compliments (10%)" (Holmes, 1986). Herbert, working with American data, reports on his analysis of a corpus of 1062 compliment responses collected at a university in New York. He found that speakers were "almost twice as likely to respond with some response other than acceptance" (Herbert, 1986a: 80).

> [V]arieties of English differ from one another not only phonology, syntax, and lexicon, but also in PRAGMATICS, that is, in the ways in which speakers use the linguistic repertoire available to them. Such differences have crucial importance for learners of English and for speakers of other varieties of English: both groups, operating with other norms, are liable to misinterpret and be misinterpreted in the American context....I suggest that Americans accept compliments less often than other English speakers due to the dominant value profile of American culture, which rests upon the notions of democratic idealism and human equality. (Herbert, 1986a: 82)

Table 2 - Compliment Response

New Zealand (Holmes, 1986)		America (Herbert, 1986)	
Accept	61%	Accept	43.6%
Deflect	29%	Deflect	30.31%
Reject	10%	Reject	26.09%
American (Creese, 1991)		**British (Creese, 1991)**	
Accept	54%	Accept	45.9%
Deflect	29%	Deflect	40.6%
Reject	17%	Reject	13.5%

American data

An analysis of the teachers' responses to compliments in the American teachers' room (see Table 2 above) revealed that the majority of compliments were accepted (54%), followed by deflections (19%) and rejections (16.3%).

British data

An analysis of the teachers' responses to compliments in the British teachers' room (see Table 2 above) revealed that 45.9% of the compliments were accepted, 40.6% were deflected and 13.5% were rejected.

It is my American data here that seems to break the patterns of earlier research in that, according to Herbert, we would expect to find only a third of the compliments accepted. It should be noted, however, that there has been some discrepancy over what actually constitutes an acceptance, deflection, and rejection (see Billmyer, 1990:39-50 for a full discussion). As Holmes and Herbert use differing categories to classify compliment responses, it is difficult to compare their two sets. Thus, in Table 2 above, I have used my interpretation of Holmes categories on Herbert's data in order to make the comparison clearer to the reader. It is obvious that until we are clear as to what constitutes an acceptance, deflection, rejection, we should be careful about making observations regarding cultural usage patterns.

Differences

Syntactic Formulas

Following previous work on complimenting, I first analyzed the data for linguistic patterning. It was Wolfson (1978) who first revealed that compliments seem to be highly pattered in structure, relying on only a few syntactic formulas. Similar research

in New Zealand also found the same syntactic patterns. The largest of these categories are presented below in Table 3.

A comparison of my American data with Wolfson and Manes categories revealed two very interesting differences. One was that more than 3/4 of my data fell into just two syntactic formulas and the other was that, of these, the most frequent was category 2 "I (really like/love NP" rather than category 1 "NP is/looks (int) ADJ." It can be seen from Table 3 (b) that the remaining four categories together make up only 23.4%. Such small numbers in each of these latter categories mean that generalizing is difficult and so my discussion of the American data will mostly concentrate on the two largest categories.

The most surprising aspect of the British data is that, unlike the American and New Zealand data, the top three categories are not those outlined above in Table 3 (a). As can be seen from Table 3 (c), although the "NP is/looks (really) ADJ" is indeed the largest of all categories as in other studies, the second largest category is a collection of miscellaneous items. This is troublesome as previous work has stressed the formulaic nature of compliments.

Table 3 - Syntactic Formulas

a) Summary of previous research (from Billmeyer, 1990)	American (Wolfson & Manes, 1989)	New Zealand (Holmes, 1988)
1. NP is/looks (int) ADJ.	43.6%	41.4%
2. I (really) like/love NP	16.1%	15.9%
3. NP is (really) (a) ADJ NP	14.9%	13.0%

(b) American Data (Creese, 1991)	Number	%
1. NP is/looks (really) ADJ Your hat looks nice	25	34.2
2. I (really) like/love NP I like your hair	31	42.4
3. PRO is (really) (a) ADJ NP That's a nice wall hanging	2	2.7
4. You V (a) (really) ADJ NP You did a damn good job	3	4.1
5. (INT) ADJ NP Oh very chic	4	5.4
6. Miscellaneous	8	10.9

(c) British Data (Creese, 1991)	Number	%
1. NP is/looks (really) ADJ	55	39.9
2. I (really) like/love NP	16	11.6
3. PRO is (really) (a) ADJ NP	8	5.8
4. You V (a) ADJ NP	7	5.1
5. You V (NP) (really) AD	2	1.4
6. You have (a) ADJ NP	1	0.7
7. Miscellaneous	49	35.5
TOTAL	138	100.0

Topic of Compliments

As Wolfson has shown, the topics of compliments fall into two major categories: appearance and ability. My findings also fall neatly into these categories (see Table 4 below).

These findings seem to tally with previous work and it is not surprising that appearance and ability are the topics most complimented. What is surprising is that, unlike the American data which agrees with the rest of the literature (Manes, 1983; Holmes, 1986) in that its largest topic category is for appearance compliments, the British data does not, its largest category

Table 4 - Number of Compliments by Topic

American (Creese 1991)			British (Creese 1991)		
Topic	Number	%	Topic	Number	%
Appearance	48	65.8	Appearance	53	39.2
Ability	24	32.9	Ability	75	54.3
Possession	1	1.3	Possession	10	7.3
Total	73	100.0	Total	138	100.0

being ability compliments. The table suggest that Americans compliment more on appearance. This is an interesting finding but it would be dangerous to overgeneralize its significance without further research.

Discussion

The interviews in the first part of this paper revealed that there may be many differences in the use of the English language between the two middle class English

speaking speech communities. We took one of these areas of difference, the compliment, and looked at similarities and differences in language use. Some interesting details were revealed. What can the findings here tell us about the cultural values of the two groups? It would be nice to generalize, to say that Americans use formulaic appearance compliments to build solidarity whereas the British prefer to give fewer formulaic ability compliments which are more sensitive to status and age. Unfortunately, I am unable to say this. Our data sample is too small, and the study not ethnographically detailed enough. It is an area worth pursuing, however, not only so that we can reach a better understanding regarding the relationship between language and culture and in particular the differences between British and American language use, but also so that any differences in language use between the two cultures can be made accessible to and used by ESL/EFL students, teachers, and textbook writers alike.

Applications for the classroom

Language and culture are bound together in a system of meaningful signs. Its symbolic nature means that speakers of a language have conventionalized its form producing a consistent and meaningful relationships between form and functions. When we teach British or American English we are already teaching our students something about how English speaking cultures express time, space, and number. Language, however, is also indexical and, as such, can indicate many things about a speaker, such as social class, gender, age, and geographical area. These indexical functions cannot be separated from symbolic functions. American English is indexed to American values and British English to British values. Speech Act analysis offers us, as students and teachers of English, one way to investigate if and where these values differ. Classroom material based on recent research on various speech act use will help us as teachers be clearer about what the speech rules are of the two groups. We must be clear, however, that although this new teaching material (Say It Naturally, A. P. Wall, 1987; Speaking Naturally B. Tillit and M. Newton Bruder, 1985, etc.) is better researched and better describes language use rules than the more intuitive material of earlier days, this material is still indexical of one speech community's rules of language use. Middle class Americans, New Zealanders, South Africans and Britons have most often served as the speech communities for such research and it is the language use rules of these middle class groups which serve as the "cultural standard" in ESL and EFL classrooms all over the world. Consequently, more work

needs to be done on these middle-class varieties especially, on the British and American varieties. It may turn out that the two groups share more sociolinguistically than they differ. If research reveals big differences, however, the discussion about which English to teach and which English students will want to learn will take on a greater importance than the usual rather superficial discussion revolving around phonetic, lexical and syntactic differences between the two dialects.

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Appendix

Prompt Sheet

1 When were you in England/America?

2 How long were you there?

3 How do you think Americans and English people differ in terms of speech

- a in requesting
- b in thanking
- c in apologizing
- d in warnings
- e in complimenting
- f in ordering
- g in suggesting
- h in complaining
- i in insulting
- j in disagreeing
- k in raising dangerous topics
- l in greeting
- m in congratulating
- n in turn taking
- o in sense of humor

4 Do you think the two countries share the same taboos. Is there anything you felt less able to talk about there than you do here?

5 What are the main differences between British and American culture?